

**For immediate release**

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**Department of Community Health**

## **Emergency Room Program Provides Patients With Treatment, Education and Direction for Non-Emergency Illnesses**

ATLANTA - In an effort to reduce unnecessary use of hospital emergency rooms (ER) and to educate patients about alternative treatment locations for chronic or primary care, the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) has begun a new pilot program in five counties, Chatham, Floyd, Habersham, Hall and White counties, with potential expansion statewide by the end of 2004.

Overcrowded emergency rooms throughout Georgia have become commonplace for handling the additional load of non-emergency and poorly managed chronic conditions. Inappropriate use of ERs places a tremendous strain on hospital resources that are already stretched to the limit, largely due to increased treatment for non-emergency illnesses. The program is intended to educate people who come to the ER for non-emergency care about alternatives so they will use those options in the future, instead of the ER. Operating in eight hospitals around the state, this new pilot program will not turn people away from hospital ERs, but will include an evaluation to determine with the patient other alternative treatment options for non-emergency cases.

Through member outreach and education, specially trained hospital staff will provide viable alternatives for routine or non-emergency care, including referrals to primary care physicians. "We believe this program will go a long way in improving the health outcomes of our Medicaid population while providing much needed relief to hospital emergency rooms, " said DCH Commissioner Tim Burgess. "It is essential that our members understand the benefits of developing a relationship with a primary care provider to address chronic health issues and maintain quality health outcomes."

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